

*Chas. Henry Sweet*

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THE  
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ORIGINAL COMMUNICATIONS.

ON THE DECREES OF GOD.

There is, perhaps, no doctrine of revelation more generally misunderstood, misrepresented and perverted, than that of divine decrees. But it is not a matter of indifference, how mankind view and treat this doctrine, which will deeply affect their characters and conditions forever. This shows the importance of examining the doctrine with attention and candour, that we may understand and embrace the truth respecting it.—The following remarks, designed to throw some light on this divine subject, are submitted to the reader's serious consideration.

1. The decrees of God are *eternal*. This conclusion results from his perfections, and is established by his word. The existence, to day, of any purpose that did not exist yesterday, necessarily implies a change in him whose purpose it is. But changeableness is an imperfection. Hence, as God is absolutely perfect, there can be no change in him. Accordingly, in his word, he is declared to be "The Father of lights, with whom

is no variableness, neither shadow of turning," and "the same yesterday, and to day, and forever." The conclusion then is, that all his decrees are eternal, or that there never was a period when they did not exist in his own infinite mind. For to say that God has any decrees now, that he had not in some past period of duration, is the same as to say, that he is mutable and imperfect, which is contrary to his word and reproachful to his character. God represents his purposes, which he executes in time, as having been formed before time began, before the foundation of the world, or from everlasting. And speaking of his purpose of redemption, which includes all his works of creation and providence, he calls it "the *eternal* purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." No truths, indeed, are more plainly revealed and taught in God's word, than the immutability of his nature, and the eternity and immutability of his counsels.

2. The decrees of God are *universal*. The Westminster Assem-

bly say, "He hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass." This accords with reason and scripture. In eternity God concerted his great plan of operation, which comprises all things and events that ever did or ever will exist.— This must be true, if he is an all-perfect being. To say that God has not laid a plan of his own universe, and fixed and arranged all things in it, is virtually to pronounce him imperfect. For to undertake any work without a previous design, demonstrates the imbecility of the undertaker.— The man who does this, is charged with folly by his fellow men, and the charge is just. It must, then, be highly arrogant to impute such weakness and folly to the blessed God. It must be blasphemous to maintain that he acts without a plan, or that if he has one, it is not as extensive as his works, but leaves many things to some future arrangement, or rather leaves them buried in the depths of uncertainty. God is the universal designer. His purposes include all his own conduct, all the conduct of all his creatures, and all things and events in the universe. For an inspired apostle saith that "of him, and through him, and to him, are all things;" and that he "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." In these passages, the universality of his decrees, as well as of his agency in their execution, is taught with the utmost plainness.

3. The decrees of God are *uncon-*

*ditional*. The divine threatenings are conditional; but this is not true of any of the divine purposes. God threatened to destroy Nineveh, unless its inhabitants should repent. This condition, though not expressed, was implied, and was understood to be, both by Jonah and the Ninevites, as appears from their words and actions. The execution of the threatening depended on the conduct of the people, and in this sense the threatening was conditional. But though God threatened to overthrow the city in forty days, he had not decreed to overthrow it at that time, but to spare it. And this decree contained the means of its preservation, which were the repentance and amendment of the people.— Accordingly, they did repent, and the impending evil was averted. Here, both the end and the means necessary for its attainment, were included in the decree, which rendered it unconditional. The same holds true of all the decrees of God. Were he to fix on a certain end, without fixing on the means necessary to be used by others to bring it to pass, the end would be brought to pass, or it would not, according as those means should happen to be used or neglected. This would render the decree conditional, and its execution uncertain. But since the decrees of God are universal, or extend to all events, they include in every case, both the end, and the means necessary to secure it. And this makes them all uncondi-

tional. They insure the existence of all those second causes and instruments, which are requisite to the complete attainment of the great object that God has in view, in all his works. In this connection, it may be remarked, that the divine decrees being unconditional and unchangeable, will all be executed. Of this there is an absolute certainty. For he, who formed them, is both able and willing to execute them all. Although God's enemies mean not to act for him, but for themselves; yet he has them entirely under his control, and makes all their efforts to accomplish their own designs, subserve the accomplishment of his. He employed Pharoah, Sennacherib and Judas, as well as Moses, Isaiah and Paul, to execute his purposes. And he forever causes all his foes, as well as all his friends, to promote their execution. Nothing can ever defeat them. Hear what he himself saith on this subject, "The Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back? The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, surely, as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand. I will work, and who shall let it? I will do all my pleasure." I add,

4. That the decrees of God are benevolent. "God is love." His whole heart is impartial love, is pure disinterested goodness. And all the counsels of his will, and all

the operations of his hand necessarily harmonize with this his goodness. "He cannot deny himself." He cannot do any thing inconsistent with his moral rectitude. Hence, his decrees, which flow from his holy and benevolent heart, must be holy and benevolent decrees. The perfect, unchanging goodness of God always leads him to do all the good he can in time and eternity. And the same goodness led him from everlasting, to decree to do all this good. He formed all his decrees with an ultimate view to his own glory, which is the most noble and excellent end that he could choose and pursue. And in executing them, he will accomplish this end, he will make the brightest and most perfect displays of all the attributes and perfections of his nature, and thus insure the endless existence of the greatest possible sum of good in the immense empire over which he reigns.

The gospel reveals God's everlasting purposes, and represents him as making, through them, bright and glorious manifestations of himself to his intelligent creatures. To the Ephesians Paul writes, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which, from the beginning of the world, hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent that

now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the *eternal* purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." Upon the whole, it is manifest that the decrees of God are most holy and benevolent ; and that in executing them, he will display all his glory, and cause as much good, as much holiness and happiness to exist forever in the creation, as his infinite wisdom and goodness, clothed with omnipotent power, can produce.

1. It appears from the preceding remarks, that all objections to the decrees of God, are groundless. One grand objection often made to them is, that they deprive men of moral freedom, and turn them into machines. But this is manifestly untrue. Moral freedom consists in acting voluntarily or from choice in the view of motives. Now, mankind are conscious that they do thus act, and hence are conscious that they are free moral agents. A machine is something that neither thinks, nor reasons, nor wills, nor loves, nor hates, nor acts at all. It may, indeed, be moved by the application of external force ; but is itself senseless, motionless, lifeless matter. Now, if it can be proved that the decrees of God do turn man into such a thing as this, then it may be proved that they destroy his moral freedom, and turn him into a machine. But what is the fact? Does not every person know

from his own experience, that he is a percipient, rational being?—that he has thoughts and desires, and that he forms designs? that he loves and hates? and in short, that he acts voluntarily or as he chooses to act in view of motives? And does he not know, therefore, that he has as much moral freedom as he could possibly have, if no divine purpose had ever been formed respecting him? The truth is, that the decrees of God, instead of destroying, or in the least impairing men's freedom, do secure it. For to be the proper subjects of moral government, men must possess moral freedom. But God has made mankind the subjects of such government, and intends that they shall be the subjects of it as long as they exist.—It is therefore, one of his eternal purposes, that they shall be free forever. How false and absurd, then, is the objection to God's decrees, that they destroy human freedom, when they do in fact establish it and render it permanent and durable as the everlasting pillars of his throne! No less fallacious and absurd are all the objections that are ever brought against his decrees. For it has been shown that they are the genuine expressions of his boundless benevolence ; that they are perfectly wise and good ; and that they lie at the foundation of all those transcendent displays which he makes of his glory, and of all that blessedness which he creates and spreads through his holy king-

dom. Were mankind divested of selfishness, which is enmity to God, they would never object to his benevolent designs, but would contemplate them with high satisfaction and joy.

2. It appears from what has been said, that the doctrine of decrees is a doctrine according to godliness, or tends to promote good works. True, it is represented by its opposers, as having an immoral tendency; but the representation is incorrect. The sabbath is made, by the impious, an occasion of much wickedness. If there were no sabbath, the wicked could not be guilty of its profanation. But does it hence follow that the holy sabbath tends to immorality? So if Christ had not come into the world, the Jews and gentiles would not have been guilty of betraying and crucifying him. But who will hence conclude, that his appearance in the flesh, his mighty works, and his spotless life naturally led to the horrid crimes of treason, perjury, blasphemy and murder, which his enemies perpetrated at the time of his passion? There is no truth of revelation, but what may be perverted, and thus made the innocent occasion of great wickedness. Yet all the doctrines of the bible have a direct tendency to promote good works. This is as true of the doctrine of decrees, as of any other doctrine. If the decrees of God were wicked, they would tend to wickedness; but since they are good, they tend to good-

ness, they lead to the practice of virtue and piety. The doctrine of decrees, clearly exhibited, brings God sensibly near to men, and men sensibly near to God, and leads them to see him every where and in every thing, and to feel their entire and constant dependence upon him. It leads the righteous to deep self-abasement before God, to exalted thoughts of God, and to unshaken confidence, strong consolation, and holy joy in God. And it has encouraged and excited his children in all ages to pray, "Thy kingdom come," and to be workers together with him in the building up of Zion. These conclusions are supported by the concurrent testimony of scripture, observation, and experience. How greatly mistaken, then, are those who think and say this is a licentious doctrine, or at least a cold and dry speculation, tending to damp the flame of holy love in the hearts of christians, to diminish their desires after God, and to weaken their efforts in his cause! Enlightened christians do know that the very reverse of all this is true. Nor, unless they are exceedingly stupid, are they willing to have this great practical, comforting, animating doctrine concealed, or but barely named.—Whenever they are in a lively frame, they love to have it clearly and fully exhibited, in connection with all other truths of scripture, knowing that this is necessary to a faithful and successful declaration of all the counsel of God.

3. The doctrine of decrees is calculated to awaken, convince and convert sinners. Many do indeed maintain, that this doctrine tends to stupify the consciences of sinners, and to give them ease while pursuing their sinful courses. Now, it is true, that unless God pours out upon sinners the convincing and converting influences of his spirit, their hard hearts will grow harder, and their blind eyes blinder, under the preaching, not only of *some*, but *all* the doctrines of revelation.—There is nothing, however, in *any* of its doctrines, which is calculated to produce this effect; but it is wholly owing to the blinding, hardening nature of sin itself.—The doctrine of decrees, as well as all divine doctrines, although abused by sinners to the increase of their blindness and stupidity, does nevertheless naturally tend to their conviction and conversion. For whatever is calculated to promote the good work that is already begun in the hearts of saints, must have a favorable bearing towards the commencement of the same work in the hearts of sinners. But a plain and faithful exhibition of the doctrine of decrees, tends to promote the growth of holiness in the saints; and therefore it tends to bring sinners to repentance. According to God's word, they are awakened, convinced and converted by his Spirit, through his truth as the means.

But the doctrine of decrees is a part of that truth, a part of that

word, which he declares "is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." It is only while the wicked either disbelieve or banish from their thoughts the doctrine under consideration, that they can live in quiet and enjoy the pleasures of sin. The moment they are made to understand, believe and feel the truth in respect to this subject, the strong holds in which they entrenched themselves, crumble to dust; the false hopes, they cherished, vanish away; the bed of down on which they reposed, becomes a bed of thorns; and they awake from their dreams of security to fear, and remorse, and anguish.—For they perceive at once how completely the universal and unchanging decrees of God throw them and their immortal interests into his hand forever; which is to them a situation of all others the most alarming and painful. And is it not desirable that sinners should be alarmed and distressed? Is it not desirable that those who hate God and are in the way to everlasting death, should be convinced of the truth respecting their characters and prospects? Is there any reason to hope that they will ever be converted and saved, without being in some measure convinced of these things? It will, perhaps, be said after all, that the doctrine of decrees is dis-

couraging to sinners. So it is, but not in the sense intended by those who use the phrase. This doctrine is calculated to discourage them from continuing any longer in sin, from taking another step in that path which is leading them to inevitable destruction. And is there any danger of making their sinful course too hard and comfortless? of throwing too many discouragements, too many obstacles in their path to ruin? Surely he who loves and would save their souls, will not spread their chosen path with roses, but will labor to plant it thick with briars and thorns, and hedge it up before them.

To close. It is the duty of ministers of the gospel to preach the doctrine of divine decess as plainly as possible, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. It is their duty to preach this great and important doctrine, because it is a doctrine of revelation, and because it is so happily calculated to promote the conviction and conversion of sinners, the sanctification of saints, the prosperity of Zion, and the glory of God. Nor can ministers be faithful to God and to the souls committed to their charge, if they neglect to preach it.

THEOPHILUS.

SERMON.—No. XI.

NUMBERS, XXIII. 25.—*And Balak said unto Balaam, neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all.*

Balak was King of Moab. The

most probable opinion respecting Balaam is, that he was a celebrated magician; but, had, by some means, acquired a knowledge of the true God. He was ambitious and covetous; and endeavoured to make his theoretic knowledge of God subservient to his selfish purposes. He appears to have prophesied in the name of Jehovah, and, thereby, to have obtained a celebrity, highly favorable to his sordid love of gain and honor. Thus, the exorcists, perceiving how efficacious the name of Jesus proved in the mouth of the apostle; attempted to cast out devils in the same name—adjuring them by Jesus, whom Paul preached, to come out. Thus Simon the sorcerer, finding the miracles of Philip, superior to the effects of his magic, professed christianity: and afterward, offered money to the apostles, “Saying, give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.”

Balaam, no doubt, had mercenary motives, for prophesying and working wonders, for the apostle assures us, that he loved the wages of unrighteousness.—His being furnished with extraordinary powers is by no means, a singular case. God has ever conferred on wicked men such gifts as would answer his own wise and benevolent purpose. And not only Balaam may say, but, we are assured, that many will say, in the day of judgement, “Lord, Lord! have we not prophesied in thy

name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works," to whom the Judge shall say, "I never knew you, Depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Balak had heard of the fame of this man. He was greatly alarmed, when he saw the Israelites encamping on the plains of Moab. In this emergency, he sent messengers unto Balaam, to come and curse Israel. And the confidence, which he had in the malediction of Balaam, is thus expressed, "I wot, that he, whom thou blessest, is blessed; and he, whom thou cursest, is cursed." Balaam appears to have been sufficiently disposed to gratify Balak—to curse the people of God. He shifted from plan to plan—had ~~plans~~ projected, and sacrifices offered; but yet, he was restrained from cursing Israel—constrained to bless them. "How said he, shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied." When Balak expostulated, saying, "I took thee to curse mine enemies, and behold, thou hast blessed them altogether. Balaam made a virtue of necessity, and said, "Must I not take heed to speak that, which the Lord hath put into my mouth?" Still, however, he discovers a willingness to try every plan; every expedient, that he might obtain permission to curse Israel; but in vain. "Behold, said he, I have received commandment to bless, and He hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it." Balak finding that he could not obtain his object, addressed Balaam, as in the text. "Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all." He desired to have them cursed; but, as he could not have this desire gratified; he wished Balaam to take a neutral position. As he was not suffered to do any thing, which would injure Israel; Balak was desirous at least, that he would not do any thing to advance their prosperity. This last resort of Balak, to neutralize Balaam, has been, in every age, one of the most successful stratagems of the enemy of souls, against the church. Not all the curses of his agents, in the world, nor all the open force, which they have exerted, has tended to advance his kingdom, and retard the prosperity of Zion, so much, as their taking neutral ground, and labouring to form a coalition between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. The curse of Balaam would have been harmless, compared with the insidious advice, which he gave, to cast a stumbling block before Israel. So satan and his emissaries are by far, less dangerous foes, when they are open in their attacks; than, when concealed under the mask of friends. The church suffered less, from the curses of pagan Rome, and by ten bloody persecutions; than she, afterwards suffered, by receiving into her bosom, the myriads of lukewarm persons who would not, openly, curse her at all—

but yet, had no heart to bless her at all. The subject, accommodated to the state of the church, furnishes the following sentiment;

The cause of the adversary is subserved, by want of decision in favor of the leading truths and duties of christianity. We shall,

1. Endeavor to illustrate this sentiment, with respect to fundamental truths. The leading truths of the gospel are extremely important. They are, in fact, the foundation of experimental and practical godliness. The holy truths, contained in the scriptures, not only distinguish christianity from all other religions; but, from every counterfeit. Jesus came into the world, to bear witness unto the truth—was hated because he told the truth—prayed, “Father, sanctify them through thy truth;”—laid down his life, in support of the truth. No intimation is given, in the bible, that it is unimportant, what men believe. On the other hand, the ministers of Christ have specific directions; “Preach the gospel”—“Preach the word.” And hearers, also have directions, “To receive with meekness, the engrafted word.” If truth had not been highly interesting; yea, essential to christianity, the Holy Ghost would not have denounced a curse on any man; or even, an angel from heaven, who should preach another gospel. Nor would he, by Jude, have directed his people, that, they should earnestly contend for the faith, which was

once delivered unto the saints.—There can be no question, with those, who believe the scriptures, whether it is essential, that gospel truth should be propagated and received. The candid inquirer will meet with no difficulty, in ascertaining the leading truths of our holy religion. They are illustrated by facts—they are illustrated by objections, which have been answered by prophets, and apostles, and Jesus Christ himself. The holy doctrines of the cross, which must be propagated and received, in order to salvation, it may be expected, that the father of lies, in order to secure his kingdom will oppose.—And as men, in a state of nature, are his willing subjects, it is easy to account for the false systems of religion; yea, it is easy to account for the rejection of the bible itself, which is the fountain of truth. Such has been the fact, with respect to numbers, in every age. But, if the gospel was sent to bless the world, then a denial of it, either by rejecting the scriptures, in which it is contained; or, by making them speak another language, is a curse. The propagators themselves, are under the curse of God, and they are a curse to all who listen to them. They openly do for satan, what Balaam was afraid to do for Balak. They labor, directly, to establish the kingdom of darkness—they wage war against the King of Zion. Such, however, are not the most formidable enemies of the Church. The evi-

dences of the christian religion, are too numerous and too conclusive, to be overthrown by the sneers of infidels; and its leading doctrines too plainly revealed, to be rejected by those, who search the scripture. Persons, therefore, who explicitly deny the inspiration of scripture, are perceived at once, to be in the ranks of the enemy, and in opposition to the cross of Christ. It will be even so respecting those who openly oppose the fundamental truths revealed. But though much has been done by undisguised warfare, yet this has not been the most successful method of the adversary. He has effected much more by teaching his emissaries a temporizing policy. "Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all." Neither oppose divine revelation, nor favor it—neither oppose the distinguishing truths of the gospel, nor favor them.—Whether people believe that there is one God, or many Gods, or no God; say nothing for, nor against any of these schemes.—If it is believed that men by nature are wholly sinful, or partially sinful, or not at all sinful; let each enjoy his opinion. In a word, whether men believe that they can be saved in any other name, or no other name, but that of Christ; with holiness or without holiness; let them alone.—Religious sentiments are various. We know not which is right—whether any are right—or but that all are right. Neither fa-

vor any, nor oppose any—but strive to effect a brotherly intimacy between those who hold these and ten thousand other discordant sentiments. How easy it is to see, that taking the ground respecting doctrines, noticed above, would as completely subserve the purpose of the enemy of souls, as any which can be conceived. Liberality and charity of this kind, however popular, are directly calculated to support the empire of the prince of darkness. It is truth, plain distinguishing gospel truth, which makes sinners free. This is the grand means of their sanctification. Hence they are exhorted, "Receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls"—and hence, the Savior prayed, "Father, sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth."—The principal ground of controversy between the world and the church, has been the adherence of the latter to gospel truth. Had the church given up this point, and taken the liberal ground, that the salvation of men is not affected by their belief, satan would have held the undivided empire of the world to this day. The fundamental truths of our holy religion must be believed, in order to affect the heart and influence the practice. So far as the light of gospel truth shines, it is blest in a greater or less degree, in dispelling the darkness of satan's kingdom, and saving souls. But, if little, or no distinction is made,

between error and truth—if they are represented as leading to the same result; sinners will continue in the dark mazes of error, and perish—for, “They love darkness rather than light.” It is as important, then, as the salvation of men’s souls, that a pointed distinction should be maintained between the gospel system and every erroneous system. If the apostles had hearkened to the Jewish rulers, when they commanded them, “Not to speak, at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus,” the triumphs of the cross would have ceased, and satan’s subjects maintained their allegiance to *him*. We pass,

2. To illustrate our leading sentiment, with respect to the duties of our holy religion. With reference manifestly, both to doctrinal and practical subjects, Christ said “He that is not with me, is against me; and he, that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad.” The kingdom of Christ, and that of the adversary, are not only different, but diametrically opposite. We read of only the broad, and the narrow way; the one leading to destruction, the other, to life.—Hence the vast importance, of taking the right way, and walking circumspectly. The enemy of Christ and souls would fain have men advance with rapid strides, in the way to destruction—but, the master-stroke of infernal policy is, to keep them out of the narrow way, which leadeth to life. But, the sinner is explicitly directed, in scripture, what he

must do to be saved; as well as what he must believe.

1. There must be a radical change of heart. Mankind are naturally in a state of sin, the willing subjects of the prince of darkness. It is their immediate duty to renounce this allegiance, and become the subjects of the Prince of peace. It is their duty, without delay, to love God; exercise all holy affections; in a word, to become new creatures. This great change, effected by the power of the Holy Ghost, satan and all his emissaries hate. Violent opposition to revivals of religion has been excited, and some have mocked, as they did on the day of Pentecost. Little, however, has been effected in this way. The Church is in much greater danger from temporizers, from those, who will not curse at all, nor bless at all. All may be considered of this description, who never say any thing against immediate attention to religion;—nor any thing for it. They leave sinners where they are, and alas! they are under the dominion of the arch-apostate. Not all the smooth harangues on the importance of decent behavior, moral honesty, and seeking to become religious, at some future time, will do their souls any good; but, on the other hand, aid them in strengthening the cords of their sins. There is no medium between a state of nature and a state of grace.

2. It is the duty of christians

to be exemplary in their lives.— They are placed in a conspicuous situation. “A city set on a hill cannot be hid.” Christ commands, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father, which is in heaven.” The followers of Christ should be decided in the cause of righteousness. When the lives of professed christians are contemplated, is there not occasion for alarm?— Is there not reason to fear, that many lukewarm persons have intruded themselves into the Church? Yea, have not real christians cause to tremble? Are not many afraid, or ashamed to make a stand against prevailing vices? and do they not, by their timidity, embolden the wicked to continue in sin? If the professed followers of Christ do little to countenance virtue and godliness, and to discountenance vice and ungodliness; they do much to subserve the cause of the adversary.

3. It is the purpose of God to christianize the world. And he has pointed out the manner, in which, he will do it. The gospel must be preached, the holy scriptures must be distributed. Jesus gave commandment, on this subject, about 1800 years ago. “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”— Every christian is under obligation to take an active part in this great enterprise. But, what has been done? The enemy of souls, as might have been expected,

has brought his most destructive engine to bear on the subject.— “Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all.” It is not strange, that this suggestion should operate on the enemies of Jesus and his cause—that they should be led to talk of the present happy state of the heathen, and of their moral virtues; and to avow the sentiment, that it would be best to let them enjoy their own religion. But can it be, that this suggestion of the father of lies, has had an influence on christians? The state of facts evinces, that it has. Professed christians in every age, no doubt would have been willing, that benighted pagans should have had the gospel. But what have they done? Centuries have revolved, and scarcely any exertions have been made. Idle wishes and unmeaning prayers for the heathen have satisfied the greater part of christendom. And what has been the consequence? Millions and millions have perished for lack of vision! The cause of satan has been subserved by the criminal indifference of the christian world. This solemn consideration should arouse the church from her slumbers, and excite her to vigorous exertion.

4. Zion’s enlargement and prosperity will be, in proportion, to the frequency and fervency of her children’s prayers. It is highly interesting, therefore, that christians be much engaged in this holy duty. It never should be for-

gotten, that all the conquests, which the church obtains over her spiritual enemies, are given by Christ, her King. No means prove effectual to this end, without divine influences. And Jesus has said, "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy spirit to them that ask him." It is a high privilege, then, as well as an imperious duty to pray to God, and especially, to ask for his spirit. Christians cannot be too frequent, too fervent, too importunate at the throne of grace. In proportion, therefore, as any yield to temptation to restrain prayer for the peace of Jerusalem; though they do not curse at all—give decisive evidence that they have no heart to bless at all. The spirit of our subject is manifestly attached to those, who, have not the spirit of prayer—by their neglect, they are subserving the cause of the adversary.

We close with the single remark. That those, who are undecided; respecting religion, may always be found in the enemy's camp. They make great pretension, it is true, to candour, charity, liberality and a desire to unite discordant parties; but, they are mere pretensions. Trace out such characters, and you will always find them siding with the world and plotting against the Church. Balaam had no better heart when he blest the Israelites, than if he had cursed them; and he was in-

strumental of far more extensive mischief, by his insidious counsel to Balak, than he could possibly have been, either, by blessing, or cursing. Thus it is with those who are not grounded and established in the christian faith. However liberal they may be with respect to every species of error; they are uniformly hostile to the truth as it is in Jesus. A union with them, on their terms, would be like the union of the Israelites with Moab, at their idolatrous feasts—and infinitely more destructive. OMICRON.

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ERRORS IN PRINCIPLE MORE PERNICIOUS THAN ERRORS IN PRACTICE.

Principles are general truths from which other truths are derived. The first principles of every science and of every religion are few and generally simple; they form the root, from which others, like the trunk and the branches, originate. It is a first principle or general truth, that God is the Creator, and by consequence, the preserver and governor of the universe. This being granted, it follows, that all intelligent beings are dependant on God—that he has a sovereign right to give them laws, and that they are accountable to him for their conduct. But if we assume it as a first principle, that all things came into existence without a cause or are themselves the cause, it will follow that we are not thus accountable. Now

an error in principle is meant the adopting that as a general truth, which is false. Paul assumed it as a first principle that Christ was an impostor; this general or first principle was false; but assuming it to be true, he verily thought that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus also the reception or rejection of any other fundamental doctrine of revelation draws after it a train of practical consequences. That the human heart is, in a moral sense, totally depraved, is a doctrine plain and easy to be understood; its meaning is simply that man, instead of loving the Lord his God, with all the heart and his neighbor as himself, loves himself supremely or is completely selfish. Yet upon the reception or rejection of this doctrine are built very different systems of religion. Admit total depravity and the declaration of scripture, that "the ploughing of the wicked is sin and his sacrifices are abomination," appears with clearness and consistency; for if the heart be totally selfish, the motives of the unregenerate, whether they plough or offer sacrifices are sinful. The admission or rejection of this fundamental doctrine may appear to be a small matter, which ought not to separate churches or professing christians: yet if this doctrine be given up, it will effect, in many respects, an entire change in our views of divine truth. Every man wishes to be consistent

with himself, and therefore, if one fundamental doctrine or first principle be abandoned, another and another must be also abandoned, for there is no consistency between truth and error. Many believe that they have nothing to fear from the threatnings of everlasting punishment, which the scripture denounces against the finally impenitent, because all men will be saved. How do they arrive at this conclusion? In general, they do it by assuming it as a first principle that sin does not merit eternal punishment. With this assumption they conclude, those passages which assert their endless punishment must be understood in a figurative sense: for it would be the greatest cruelty to punish the sinner beyond the desert of his transgression. Hence has arisen a very great controversy in determining what the bible reveals. One man assumes that this, another that, that doctrine cannot be true. No matter, therefore, how plainly it is revealed; if it cannot be true, it must be false, and another meaning must be attached to those passages, in which it is revealed. The same difficulty would exist, if an angel should speak to man from heaven. Were an angel to reveal, that the finally impenitent shall go away into everlasting punishment, mankind would begin to inquire, What does he mean? Eternal misery cannot be his meaning; for this we know would be cruel and unjust. What then does he mean? Does he not

mean that all shall be *finally saved*? Thus Paul in the face of Christ's ministry and miracles, was prepared to shut up the saints in prison and when they were put to death, to give his voice against them, because he had assumed it as a first principle, that Jesus of Nazareth was an impostor.

With this illustration of the nature of first principles and of their connection with practical consequences, I can now proceed to the main design of this communication, which is to show, that *Errors in principle are more pernicious than errors in practice.*

1. They are more difficult of detection. Errors in practice, when not the result of errors in principle, are committed against the united testimonies of reason and conscience; but errors in principle are never sincerely adopted until reason and conscience are engaged to support them.— Thus Paul verily thought, that he ought to shut up the saints in prison and when they were put to death, he gave his voice against them. Had Paul's been a practical error only, his own conscience would have testified against him; but being an error in principle, it was exceedingly difficult of detection. He really thought it his duty to shed their blood, and to compel them to blaspheme. We are aware of the great difficulty in persuading the heathen, that theirs is an idolatrous religion; before this can be

accomplished an entire change must be effected in their views of truth. This difficulty proceeds from their errors, being errors in principle. The drunkard promises a speedy reformation: but the errorist in principle, although led to the commission of the blackest crimes, presses forward in the full persuasion that he is doing his duty.

2. Errors in principle have a more pernicious influence on society than errors in practice. Although the errorist in practice is a pernicious example, as he blunts the edge of sensibility, and renders crimes familiar; yet his influence will not compare with that of the errorist in principle. He may render crimes familiar, but he dares not justify them. He is conscious that he is wrong; he therefore appears before the world with a self accusing countenance. He may endeavor to palliate, but he cannot justify his errors. But the errorist in principle is persuaded that he is right; he comes in the disguise of religion, and like Paul, thinks that he ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. These things he will do. He offers you poison and with every appearance of sincerity tells you, it is an excellent medicine; he blinds your eyes, yet really believes, he has enabled you to see more clearly. Although he ruins the soul, he verily thinks he has done God service. Conscious of the rectitude of his cause, and fired with a per-

severing zeal, like the ancient Pharisees, he is willing to compass sea and land to gain one proselyte, although he makes him two fold more the child of hell than before.

3. That errors in principle are more pernicious than errors in practice, is evident from the fact, that they are the prolific source of the worst kinds of *practical* errors. They are the root of which practical errors are the branches. This is exemplified in the history of Paul. He went from city to city, to compel their inhabitants to blaspheme. He shut up the saints in prison and when they were put to death, he gave his voice against them. He raged for their blood and persecuted them unto strange cities. Here let us trace these cruel feelings to their cause. Was Paul more bloody than other men? Had he greater delight in blasphemy? This cannot be pretended. In other situations, he was tender, affectionate and merciful. The cause of these cruelties may be found in the influence of errors in principle. Paul was a sincere believer in a false system of religion, and verily believed that he was doing his duty. The page of history is polluted with a long catalogue of crimes, which owed their existence to the same cause. Infidels have reiterated the charge that more blood has been shed on account of religion, than from every other cause. Whether we admit or repel the charge, it

must be granted, that errors in principle, whether in law, politics, or in religion, have been the most prolific source of errors in practice.

Our subject may serve to illustrate the fallacy of the opinion, "That he is right who acts as well as he knows." Every person, who acts according to the testimony of his own conscience, may be said to do as well as he knows. Thus Paul, when he compelled the saints to blaspheme, verily thought that he ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. The heathen, who worship idols, burn widows, drown their children and commit suicide, are fully persuaded, that by such acts, they shall merit divine favor. The universalists, deists, and other errorists are doubtless many of them, sincere in their belief.—Are they therefore guiltless? If their sincerity will justify them, then Paul was guiltless; yet Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, called himself the chief of sinners, because he persecuted the church of God. But if Paul's sincerity did not acquit him of guilt, we may conclude that there is an error in the commonly received opinion, that he is right who acts according to the dictates of his own conscience. Permit me, reader, to substitute another in the place of this generally received principle. He is not necessarily right who acts as well as he knows; but he is right who acts as

well as he has the means of knowing. Had Paul acted as well as he had the means of knowing, he would have been innocent; for then he would have improved the talents committed to his charge. Paul did not do this, therefore he was guilty. He had the means of knowing that Jesus is the Christ; but being exceedingly attached to the self-righteous religion of the Pharisees and exceedingly mad against the christians, he shut his eyes against the light and deceived his own conscience. The heathen possess the light of nature, and if they improved their advantages, they would be justified.— But not choosing to know what they have the means of knowing; therefore, by the law of nature, they are guilty. You enjoy the light of the gospel, you have the means of knowing the way, the truth and the life. You may shut your eyes, prejudice your mind, harden your heart, and at last sincerely believe any of the false and destructive errors of the age: but your sincerity will not excuse you. God is treating us as rational and intelligent beings, and he will at last require of us, not sincerity merely, but an honest and faithful improvement of the talents committed to our charge.

Our subject may serve to illustrate the importance of examining the evidence, on which we found our belief of first principles. Only take a false principle for granted, and you may reason fairly and conclusively, and yet be

further and further removed from truth. Admit that Jesus of Nazareth was an impostor, and Paul would find no difficulty in justifying his persecutions, by the Jewish law. When Christ was brought before Pilate, the Jews demanded his crucifixion, because he was guilty of blasphemy. Admit that he was an impostor, and both their charge and plea are good: for by their law, blasphemy was punished with death. In the same way, every other errorist may establish his conclusions, if the principles on which they are founded are taken for granted.— Admit the principle for which Hume contended, that the reality of miracles cannot be established by testimony, and deism might triumph over christianity. Admit that sin does not deserve an eternal punishment, and it may be proved that there will be a general restoration of the impenitent. Admit that Christ came to abrogate the divine law, and you may prove that all will be happy after death. Hence the importance of examining the evidence, on which we rest first principles. If our first principles are false, we may very sincerely embrace the greatest and most destructive errors: we may think ourselves right when we are wrong, our state safe, when it is ruinous; that we are the friends, while we are the enemies of God; that we are doing good, while we are doing evil; and that we are advancing the cause, while we are persecut-

ing the friends of the Lord Jesus.

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*Messrs. Editors,*

In looking over your Magazine for December, I perceived that one of your subscribers wishes for information upon a subject, which he thinks important. If you should judge the following communication will be of use to him, or to the public, you are at liberty to insert it in any of the subsequent numbers of your work.

In order to bring the subject, and what I have to offer, respecting it, under one view, I will quote the words of your subscriber.

“There are many persons within the circle of my acquaintance, who hope they are pious, but still neglect to make a public profession of religion, from fear, that they have not the necessary qualifications for church membership. If you or some of your correspondents will state, what these qualifications are, and some of the evidences by which we may know whether we possess them, you will confer a favor upon an interested subscriber.”

C.

In order to be qualified for membership in the christian church, it is necessary that a person should know the principal doctrines and duties of the gospel, and be settled in his belief of their truth and importance. For, if he be ignorant of them, or wavering in his faith concerning them, with what

sincerity or comfort can he profess the religion of Christ?

A second thing necessary to church membership is, that a person should understand the nature of covenanting with God, and with his people. He should know that God, in the riches of his goodness through the Redeemer, proposes to enter into covenant with all those who properly enter into covenant with him, and to be under engagement to them respecting their souls and salvation. He should be acquainted with what God engages to perform, and with what those who enter into covenant with him and with his professing people, lay themselves under obligations to do. And he should, not only, have information concerning what is implied and required in the covenant, but be willing to enter into it, and to be under special obligations to be and to do what it requires.

A third qualification is a willingness to submit to the regular discipline of Christ in his church. No one that is unwilling to submit to the order of Christ's house, is qualified to enter it. Nor is he who is unwilling to be active and faithful and to stand in his lot in watching over the members, and in reproving and exhorting them, as occasion may require, and in maintaining the order and discipline of the church. If a person esteem the church of Christ, and is willing to be in subjection to it, and to use his influence and exertions for its order and purity

he is, in these respects, qualified for membership.

I mention, as a fourth qualification, a disposition to unite with the church in supporting the worship and ordinances of God. It is incumbent on a church to see that these are maintained among them, for the honor and glory of God, for their mutual instruction and benefit, and for the instruction and salvation of others. These are among the purposes for which a church is instituted. All who would unite with it, should be willing to aid in promoting them.

Further. True religion, or a real change of heart is an indispensable qualification. Let his other qualifications be what they may, no one should unite with the church who is not a subject of renewing grace, and of consequence, of repentance and faith in Christ. He must be more than a nominal, he must be a real christian. The church was not designed to embody saints and sinners, but saints only. No others can honestly and cordially enter into covenant with God, and with one another. No others are the real friends of Christ. No others renounce the world, and take God to be their God and portion, and accept of salvation by the Redeemer. No others do, in truth, give up themselves to God, to be his in life, in death, and forever.

To pass to the consideration of the other part of the subject: a person may know, whether he be a christian in reality, and of con-

sequence, whether he possess the other qualifications, in some good measure.

First, by consciousness. True religion has its beginning and seat in the heart. As unrenewed men are entirely sinful, so any holy affections and exercises are evidence of being renewed in the spirit and temper of the mind.— Let those who feel interested inquire, whether they are conscious of having experienced any essential change in their feelings, and whether they have any holy exercises and affections. Right or holy affections are supreme love to God, a desire that his honor and glory may be promoted, and to know and to do his commandments and unreserved submission to his will. Those, who possess them, hate sin and are humbled for it before God. The controversy, which they have had with him, is given up, and they have been reconciled to his character and to his moral and providential government. If this should be thought not clear and distinctive, and that there is danger of being deceived, let the inquirer ask, in what his affections are centred, whether in God, or the world: what he feels to be his portion and chief good: in what he delights the most: or what is the most pleasing to his heart. If he cannot determine whether his motives be right, let him consider what are the highest objects of his affections and joys.

In the next place, a person may

know something by his conduct concerning the reality of his religion. This may furnish evidence to himself as well as to others. A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, will bring forth good things. The outward life will manifest something of the principles that exist and reign within. The nature of the tree is ascertained by its fruit. Men do not gather grapes of thorns nor figs of thistles. If a person delight in and regularly perform christian duties and is disposed and resolved to continue in the performance of them, the evidence of the reality of his religion, is in his favor. But if he habitually neglect plain moral and religious duties and live in known and allowed neglect of them, he ought to consider his piety, at best, as very questionable. The reality of his faith does not appear from his works.

If, then, a person has a knowledge of the leading doctrines and duties of the gospel and is conscious of believing and loving them; if he understand what is implied in covenanting with God and his people and be willing to enter into a covenant engagement with them and then to lay himself under special obligations to lead a dutiful and holy life; if he be willing to submit to the regular discipline of the church and to assist in maintaining it and the ordinances and institutions of Christ; and if he be conscious of having these and the other marks of piety; and his life

is measurably in favor of his being a true christiain, he is qualified for membership in the church of Christ. To be free from all doubts is, by no means, indispensable to a union with the church. The want of a well-grounded hope is but the want of assurance, is not a disqualification. Persons who believe that they have been renewed may be kept from making a profession of religion, through fear that they shall not be able to live as they ought to do, if they should make a profession. This is to neglect a present important duty under the apprehension, that they may fail in performing some future duties. There may be something of pride in this fear. Here is certainly a distrust of the promises and power of Christ. Others, who have hope, may think themselves too deficient in religion to be united with the church and therefore, they delay, that they may grow in grace and become more prepared for such a union. If facts could be known, it would probably appear, that nothing was ever gained by a delay for this purpose. Besides, will the christian be likely to grow more in holiness out of the church than in it? By the neglect of the means of divine appointments than by the observance of them. It is grace, and not the degree of grace that is required. Delay for the purpose mentioned, partakes more of the spirit of self-righteousness and self-dependance, than of real humility, faith and obedience. Those, who contemplate

a union with the visible followers of Christ, should ask themselves, as in the presence and fear of God, whether they have reason to believe, that they are the subjects of renewing grace, and have accepted of salvation on the terms of the gospel; whether they esteem the church of Christ and desire its privileges; whether it is in obedience to Christ, that they wish to come to the holy ordinance of the supper; whether they can truly and cordially give up themselves and their all to God and to his service, and take him for their portion, and can willingly lay themselves under the bonds of the covenant to him and to his people, to live as the grace of God teaches. If they can answer these questions in the affirmative, they need not hesitate about their qualifications for church membership.

D.

## A QUESTION.

*Messrs. Editors,*

I do not wish to bring my difficulties very often, either before you, or the public; but I have some acquaintances, about whom I wish to ask your opinion. But before I tell you about them, it will be proper to tell you who I am. I am a plain bible man, disposed to believe what it says and to do what it requires. To be short: some years since, I was brought to a deep sense of my sinfulness and guilt, and was clearly

convinced of the opposition of my heart to God, and of the great danger I was in, of perishing as his enemy. At length, I perceived a change in my affections and views in respect to God, his law and government. I saw that he was right and I was wrong and criminal. I justified him and condemned myself. I felt willing to be and do as he should order concerning me. A peace and joy ensued to which I had been an entire stranger. In looking into the bible, I found, that I had the feelings to which the promises of pardon and salvation are made. I began to hope and have continued to do so. Although I often sink, as into the dust, before God, on account of my sins; yet I enjoy myself beyond comparison better than I ever did before. I pray in my family and religiously educate my children. I am conscientious in attending public worship and ordinances, and in observing the sabbath and in doing what appears to be my duty. My hope of heaven rests on the atonement of Christ and on the promises made to the renewed in heart. Had I no evidence of repentance towards God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, I should be without hope. I see not but I have as much peace of mind as any around me. I have heard no complaint of my being dishonest in my dealings, or neglectful in the performance of the civil and social duties of life. But some of my acquaintances tell me that my ex-

perience and performance of religious duty are unnecessary, and that my belief is tradition and wholly false. They labor abundantly with me, and urge me to renounce my creed and to embrace theirs, which, in the main, is this; that every body is going to heaven, let them feel and live as they may. So far as I can learn, I am not the only one, but that very many others are urged and pressed to believe as they do.— Now the questions which I wish you, or some of your correspondents to answer are these: What shall I think of these men? What is their motive? If they are certain that all are going to heaven, why should they have so much concern about what they believe? They manifest no more concern than others about what people do. Any one may do what he pleases, if he will only believe with them. Do they think that I, or others would be any better members of society, if we should adopt their creed? Do they think, that we should be any more honest, or any more moral in any respect? Do they suppose that I and others would feel more happy, if we believed as they do? Is it then their great benevolence towards me, that disposes them to be so unwearied in their endeavors to destroy my faith and to force upon me their own? Do they think that their opinions are more honorable to God and therefore, they are disposed to take all ways and times to inculcate them? Am I

then, to suppose that their concern for the honor and glory of God leads them to so much zeal and activity? They do not, as I can see, manifest such concern in any other way. I again ask, what I ought to think of the motives of these men? What is their object? Now, I could well enough hear them pity and vilify every denomination but their own; I could bear being troubled often with their books and zealous conversation, if I could see good reasons for believing that they had any better end in view, than the propagation of their sentiments and the increase of their number. If you, or some of those who write for your Magazine, and who can see farther into men and things than I can, would answer the questions I have proposed you will gratify

BIBLICUS.

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THE GOSPEL OF GOD GLORIOUS.

The word gospel, properly signifies good news. In this sense, the heavenly hosts understood the gospel, when they celebrated the birth of the glorious Redeemer.— “The angel said unto the shepherds, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God

in the highest ; and on earth peace, good will towards men." The gospel is good news, because it proclaims the grace and glory of God in the great purpose of redemption through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. This purpose was formed by God, before he had created the heavens and the earth, or given existence to men or angels. The gospel, which reveals this eternal purpose, is called "the glorious gospel of the blessed God." And it is glorious, because it displays the glory of God.

Though God can look directly into the hearts of his creatures, yet they cannot look directly into his heart. Though God be in himself infinitely glorious, yet his creatures cannot discern his glory without some medium through which it is displayed. The gospel is the scheme, which God devised from eternity, to manifest himself to his intelligent creatures. This design is, in various respects, exceedingly glorious.

1. It is the greatest design, which God could form. The greatness of any design consists in its extent. The more extensive any design is, the greater it is. When God formed the purpose of redemption, there was, in the universe, nothing to limit his design, but his own pleasure. He existed alone ; and all time and space lay before his mind, without a single impediment in the way of his extending his design as far as possible. There was no reason, therefore, why he should not act

like himself in forming his design and make it as extensive, as his infinite understanding could make it. Accordingly, he has taught us in the scriptures, that his great purpose of redemption does extend from eternity to eternity and include and affect every being and object in the universe. It comprises every material particle in the material world ; every sensitive nature in the animal world ; every rational creature in the moral world ; and every intelligent being in the intellectual system. In forming this design God had a first and supreme regard to himself ; then he regarded his Son ; then his Spirit ; then good and bad angels ; then good and bad men ; and then every creature and object, that he has made for the use of his rational creatures. The apostle expressly declares to the saints at Ephesus, that it is the design of the gospel "to gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth." In his epistle to the saints at Colosse, he dwells more largely upon the wonderful extent of the design of redemption through Jesus Christ. He says—"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers ; all things were created by him and for him."

The design of the gospel extends to the utmost bounds of creation ;

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like himself in forming his design and make it as extensive, as his infinite understanding could make it. Accordingly, he has taught us in the scriptures, that his great purpose of redemption, does extend from eternity to eternity and include and affect every being and object in the universe. It comprises every material particle in the material world ; every sensitive nature in the animal world ; every rational creature in the moral world ; and every intelligent being in the intellectual system. In forming this design God had a first and supreme regard to himself ; then he regarded his Son ; then his Spirit ; then good and bad angels ; then good and bad men ; and then every creature and object, that he has made for the use of his rational creatures. The apostle expressly declares to the saints at Ephesus, that it is the design of the gospel "to gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth." In his epistle to the saints at Colosse, he dwells more largely upon the wonderful extent of the design of redemption through Jesus Christ. He says—"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers ; all things were created by him and for him."

The design of the gospel extends to the utmost bounds of creation ;

and to the utmost bounds of duration. It is as extensive as possible; it is as extensive as God could make it. He meant to form as great a design, as the perfections of his nature could enable him to form. And in the purpose of redemption God has formed such a design, as will, in its accomplishment, manifest all his greatness as fully and clearly as possible, during the endless ages of eternity. The design of the gospel is, therefore, perfectly glorious in greatness.

2. The gospel is glorious in wisdom. It is the wisest design that God could form. This wisdom, however, does not appear merely from its extent. Many designs, that are formed by created agents and are great in their extent, are entirely destitute of wisdom and extremely foolish and absurd. But the great design of the gospel is as perfect in wisdom, as it is in greatness, because it was formed by the only wise God.—When all the designs, that were possible, were before his mind, it was morally impossible for him not to adopt the wisest. In forming the greatest possible design, God must have employed his highest wisdom. No reason can be assigned, or even conceived, why God should not display all his wisdom in forming the design of redemption. And it is certain from scripture, as well as from reason, that the gospel contains all the wisdom that God ever will display, or that created beings ever will discover.

It was formed on purpose, as the apostle declares, to make known his manifold wisdom to principalities and powers in heavenly places, and to all other intelligent creatures. And though they may always admire, yet they will never be able to comprehend the wisdom of the gospel. Hence the apostle, in the contemplation of this subject, exclaims, in a rapture of admiration, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out?” Wisdom spreads a glory over any design; and especially over a great design which requires a great variety of means to accomplish it. In the gospel there is the most astonishing combination of means to accomplish its ultimate end. And in this respect, it contains and displays the greatest wisdom of the wisest being. The end, which God proposes in the gospel and the means he uses to obtain it, are perfect in wisdom. The gospel is therefore, as glorious in wisdom as it is in greatness.

3. The gospel is glorious in goodness. It is the best design that could be formed by the infinite goodness of God. A design may be great in extent and wise in all its parts, and yet be totally evil in its nature and tendency. But of all possible designs the gospel is absolutely the best. “God is love.” And all his natural perfections are entirely under the direction of his perfect benevolence.

It was morally impossible, that he should form a design, that was malevolent and pernicious, or one that was destitute of perfect goodness. His infinite understanding enabled him to discern the greatest natural and moral good of the universe through the boundless ages of eternity; his unerring wisdom enabled him to devise all the means, which are necessary to effect his greatest good; and his goodness must have necessarily chosen and fixed this best design, in preference to every other design. It is demonstrably certain, that the scheme of redemption is a transcript of the divine character and as perfect in goodness as it is in wisdom. It proposes the best end that could be proposed. As it embraces all intelligent beings, so it consults and secures the highest holiness and happiness of the intellectual system. And as it is the goodness of God, which adorns his other perfections, so it is the goodness of the gospel, that renders it superlatively glorious. All the glory of the blessed God is instamped upon it and discovered by it.—Accordingly the apostle says, “God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” The gospel is so perfectly and infinitely benevolent and gracious in its nature, design and effects, that it will eventually discover all the feeling of God’s heart respecting himself and all his creatures and display all the moral excellence of his moral character. “The breadth and length, the depth and height” of the divine goodness will be forever displayed and seen in the face of Jesus Christ. The gospel is designed to display all the glory of God; or to cause all his goodness to be seen and felt by every rational creature. And this display of his goodness will produce the greatest extent of holiness and happiness, that can possibly exist in the universe. It will fill the ever enlarging capacities of all holy creatures with knowledge, love, joy and praise forever and ever. It is the benevolent nature, tendency and influence of the gospel, which renders it supremely glorious. The gospel is as glorious in goodness, as it is in wisdom and greatness. It is indeed, the goodness of the gospel, which glorifies its greatness and wisdom.—The gospel is as good as the heart of God, which consists in pure, perfect, infinite and eternal benevolence and forms the whole glory of his existence, perfections, designs and works. The gospel is “the gospel of the glory of the blessed God.” It contains all the glory of God and all the glory of the universe.

PAUL.

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*Messrs. Editors,*

In reading the scriptures, I have often been perplexed with the question, whether God, who so often spake to Abraham and the

prophets, and who, throughout the Old Testament, is spoken of as the Creator of the world, &c. is Christ in his official capacity, or God the Father. If some of your correspondents will answer this question satisfactorily, they will confer a special favor upon one, if no more of your constant readers.

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From the Utica Christian Repository.

#### NEW DENOMINATION.

There have been, in all ages, different denominations of religionists. We have long been accustomed to hear of Calvinists, and Arminians, and Antinomians, and Unitarians, and Universalists, and a great variety of other names, intended to designate those who embrace schemes of religion differing more or less from each other.— And we have heard of *Nothingarians*, who are supposed to embrace no religious system whatever. But there is a class of men, who are becoming very numerous at the present day, who have, I think, no appropriate designation. They are not, indeed, found by themselves, as a distinct community, but are intermingled with other communities. Their principles, however, and their practices, are such as clearly entitle them to a distinct name. And their being intermingled with other communities is no objection to this. For we hear of Calvinistic Episcopalians, Calvinistic Presbyterians, Calvinistic Congregationalists, Calvin-

istic Baptists, and so also of Arminian Episcopalians, Arminian Presbyterians, Arminian Congregationalists, and Arminian Baptists. It is a great convenience to have a name, if one can be found sufficiently expressive of the thing, since it saves much circumlocution. And no one is ever ashamed of his name, unless he is ashamed of the thing which that name expresses. And as this class, of which I am speaking, are already very numerous, and are rapidly extending their influence, and bid fair, I think, to be the prevailing denomination, which, at no distant day, may swallow up all others, I think it is high time they had a distinct name. And as no term occurs to me more expressive of their true character, or more descriptive of their principles and practice, I would take the liberty of proposing, until some better name is suggested, that they be called *Anythingarians*.

In the early part of my life I met occasionally with some of this class, and not fully understanding their principles, I sometimes wondered at their conversation and conduct. But further acquaintance with men and things has explained it all. I once resided for a considerable time in a populous place, where there were several churches, the ministers of which frequently interchanged their labors and where also travelling preachers frequently stopped and spent a sabbath. Of course, there was a great variety in the preaching

both as to style, manner, and talent, and as to the sentiments which were inculcated. A certain class of hearers, however, were always pleased. Let the preacher be whom he might, if he only spoke fluently and gracefully, and let the sentiments of his discourse be what they might, this class of hearers were always gratified. I could never come out of the place of worship, and walk the length of a street in their company, without hearing them exclaim, "What an excellent sermon! What a fine preacher!" And I often had to cross the street, or hurry along with a haste scarcely decent, to avoid the usual interrogatory, "Don't you think it was an excellent sermon?" This class of people, I conclude, were *Anythingarians*."

Happening once in a strange place, I inquired something about their preacher, and the reply was "Oh, he is one of the best of preachers; *every body* is pleased with him. Before he came among us there were many different parties, each having their own peculiar views, and keeping up separate meetings: Now, *all* are united. Calvinists and Arminians, Presbyterians and Episcopalians, Baptists and Methodists, and Quakers, all go to hear him, and all are equally well pleased; and the congregation increases rapidly." I thought he must be a rare kind of character to be entitled to such a commendation as this. But a few more years' acquaintance with

the world has corrected my error and convinced me that this character is not so rare as I then imagined. It is not yet, however, quite clear to my mind whether he was an Anythingarian or a Nothingarian, though my opinion inclines to the former. Most of his hearers were without doubt, Anythingarians.

I have known some men of such a happy versatility of genius that they could so accommodate themselves to those with whom they happened to be, and so enter into all their views and feelings, as to seem, for the time, to be just like them. Like the chameleon, they always assumed the color of those objects to which they were nearest. With Calvinists, they would seem to talk in favor of the doctrines of grace; and with Arminians, they would seem to be opposed to those doctrines, and in favor of the opposite views. With Episcopalians, they would speak well of the church, and seem to have no aversion to forms of prayer, and confirmation, and ordination by bishops. With Presbyterians, they would seem to prefer the Presbyterian order and government; and with Congregationalists, they would seem to be well pleased with their system. With Baptists, they would express a high opinion of the purity and orthodoxy of their churches, seem almost willing to *go into the water* and appear to approve of every thing but their close communion, and not blame them for that.—

With Methodists, they would talk fluently of their *good feelings*, exhort in their meetings, say *amen* to their prayers, encourage women to speak in public, and exhort awakened sinners to *press forward*. With Quakers, they would say *thee* and *thou*, and talk of the *light* within. And with all, they would expiate on the evils of a sectarian spirit, and enlarge in the praises of charity and liberal sentiments in religion. I have been sometimes greatly puzzled to account for such apparent changes, from one thing to its opposite, made in so short a time, and with so much facility. But I think I have found out the secret. These men were Anythingarians.

Besides the foregoing traits of character, which distinguish those of this denomination, I have taken notice of some other, which I will mention.

When a man, in all companies abounds in religious small talk, but carefully avoids saying any thing that has much point, or is very decided any way, I set him down as an Anythingarian.

When a man professes to think well of two opposite schemes of religion, and declares that he likes them both, and sees no important difference between them; or when two books, written on opposite sides of the same question, are presented to him, and after examination, he declares that he admires them both, and thinks they are equally good; I set him down as an Anythingarian.

When a man acknowledges the truth as the instrument of the conversion and sanctification of men, and at the same time embraces in his fellowship those who understandingly hate and oppose the truth, I set him down as an Anythingarian.

When a man professes to believe that holiness consists in disinterested benevolence, and that every selfish experience is a false experience, and yet embraces in his fellowship those who openly avow that their religion is wholly selfish, and those who publicly ridicule the idea of disinterested benevolence as chimerical and impossible, I set him down as an Anythingarian.

When two men of opposite principles go and converse with a third person for the purpose of ascertaining what his principles are, and each comes away with the impression that he agrees with him, I set down that third person as an Anythingarian.

When a man professes to believe the doctrines of the bible to be true, and acknowledges that they are plainly and abundantly taught in the scriptures, and at the same time considers the preaching of them as unprofitable and useless, if not positively injurious, and so converses with the opposers of those doctrines that they consider him as much opposed as they are, I set down that man as an Anythingarian.

When a man professes to believe the doctrines of the bible to be

true, and declares that he is willing to have them preached, but is always in a tremor when he hears any of them mentioned from the pulpit, for fear they should be carried *too far*, I set him down as an Anythingarian.

When a man professes to believe the doctrines of the bible to be true, and declares that he understands them, and is edified with them, but is afraid of having them preached, lest *other people* should not understand them and be edified, I set him down as an Anythingarian.

When a man flatters me to my face, and speaks highly of me to my particular friends, but talks against me to my enemies, and elsewhere throws out sly hints to my disadvantage, I set him down as an Anythingarian.

When a man tells me that he agrees with me in my opinions, and admires my method of stating and vindicating them, and wishes he was only able to do it as well, and at the same time is very intimate with those who oppose my principles, and encourages all their efforts to bring those principles into disrepute, I set down that man as an Anythingarian.

When a church has a confession of faith, and require all whom they receive as members to give their public assent to it, and at the same time do not carefully examine applicants to know whether they understand and believe the doctrines contained in that confession, or knowingly receive

such as do not believe those doctrines, or retain, without any effort at discipline, those members who openly oppose the doctrines to which they have solemnly assented I set down that church as a body of Anythingarians.

When a church has a covenant, by which all the members have solemnly bound themselves to walk *with that church* in all the ordinances of the gospel, and yet suffer their members to *walk away* whenever and wherever they please, I think that church must be deeply tinctured with Anythingarianism.

I might mention other traits, which distinguish this denomination from all others, and give them a claim to a distinct title; but these few hints will enable every reader to supply others from his own observation. And I intended to say something of the great advantages of belonging to this denomination; in which, however, I must be brief.

As I have observed already, I think this denomination bids fair to be the prevailing denomination, and to swallow up all others. And every one must be sensible of the great advantage of belonging to that denomination which is the most numerous and powerful, and has the most extended influence. If a man belongs to a small body, he might almost as well stand alone. He cannot derive much help from his associates, and, whatever his talents may be, he is easily borne down by the resistless current of popular opinion. He can-

not hope to gain any distinguished elevation in the world, and must be content to live and die in obscurity. But if he belongs to a great body, of extensive power and influence, he can hope through their assistance, to rise to eminence. And all the power and influence and character of that body may be considered as in some sense his own, since he is one of them. And in proportion as he is zealously devoted to the honor and interests of that body, he may expect they will have an eye to his honor and interests: and as he contributes to the advancement of his associates, he may expect them also to contribute to his. Every one must see, therefore, the great advantage of belonging to this denomination, as it regards his prospects of rising in the world.

The private professor, who adopts Anythingarian sentiments, possesses one great advantage over those of any other denomination. He can more easily establish and maintain the reputation of uncommon and distinguished piety; and especially with those whose acquaintance with him is but superficial. By making this his object and keeping it steadily in view, and becoming "all things to all men," in the sense and to the extent which his principles teach; by abounding in religious small talk, and being careful in mixed companies to say nothing of a decided character; by studying the principles and feelings of those with whom he converses, and care-

fully accommodating himself to their views and prejudices, so as to make them pleased with themselves, and think he is pleased with them; by appearing to agree with them in those things which they regard as most important, and not very strenuous in those things in which he differs from them; by appearing to embrace them cordially in his fellowship, and to think quite as favorably of their religious character and sentiments as of his own; by pursuing this method, he may render himself very agreeable to all sorts of people, and gain the reputation of having an uncommon share of good feeling, and of being an eminent example of piety, charity and catholicism. And if any whose acquaintance is more intimate, should ever suggest a doubt whether he is not the best man in the world, it will be at once interpreted to the disadvantage of him who makes the suggestion, and it would be better for him to hold his peace, or join in the general commendation.

The minister who adopts Anythingarian sentiments, will find it much easier to get along in the world. If he has only common talents, he can soon become a great man. If he becomes "all things to all men," in the sense which these sentiments teach, he must needs be very popular. And as to his preaching, that, of course will be accommodated to the taste of his hearers. If they are Anythingarians too, it will be very ea-

sy to please them. And if it should happen that a part of them are decided and rigid in their adherence to orthodox sentiments, he can so temper his discourses as to introduce many orthodox terms, which will make them think he is correct in his sentiments; and in private he can so converse with them as to render that impression deeper; while, by only introducing orthodox terms, and never explaining them, or if he should think some professed explanations necessary, by giving very general ones, which every hearer may interpret according to his own views, he will never offend those who are not orthodox. They will even be quite willing to hear the orthodox doctrines so preached. In this manner he will gain the esteem and confidence of all classes, and thus secure to himself a good name for keeping people together and building up society; and what is of some consequence too, he will secure a comfortable support to himself and family, and not be exposed, as the rigidly orthodox minister frequently is, to be driven about from place to place, an object of pity and of scorn.

And if the young preacher who adopts Anythingarian sentiments does not readily find a good vacancy in which to settle himself comfortably, perhaps, by putting his sentiments in practice, he can *make* one. Let him look out for some place which has an older minister of orthodox sentiments, and where there is some religious

excitement. He can easily get recommended as a useful assistant at such a time. And when he is introduced, as he can scarcely fail of being, let him visit from house to house, and attend meetings with great diligence and zeal. Let him carefully study the views and feelings of the various sorts of people, and accommodate himself to every one according to the distinguishing principles of his sect. Let him now and then drop a hint, where he thinks it will do, that he is better acquainted with the management of a revival than their minister is; and let him often tell in public, how *many* revivals he has seen, and how *well* he understands them. Let him direct all his efforts to produce a general excitement of feeling, and to raise it to the highest pitch; and just at this crisis, let him privately urge the minister to preach the doctrine of election, as the best means at this moment, to produce a powerful effect, and greatly promote the work; and tell him how it has been done to great advantage by this, that, and the other minister, during great revivals in their societies. As an orthodox man he may be very probably inclined to do it; and if he should not, advantage can be afterwards taken of his neglecting to follow this good advice. But if he should, the point desired will most probably be gained. A violent opposition will be excited on the part of the impenitent whose attention



is so far roused as to make them feel and hate the truth. And by a little management some of the church members may probably be induced to join in that opposition. Now let the young preacher, in conversation with all such, speak much of the danger of having that doctrine preached at such a time, as being likely to discourage sinners, grieve the Spirit, and stop the revival; and let him lament that the minister should be so imprudent, at such a critical time, and express his fears that the revival will stop. By the opposition and confusion which may be thus created, it is not unlikely that the excitement may be greatly diminished, and finally cease, and the minister be charged with destroying the revival. And it is quite likely that all this may occasion his dismission, and make way for the settlement of the young man in his place. Or if he should happen to get so far involved in the difficulty as to have no prospect of obtaining the place for himself, he may obtain it for some friend, who has been doing the same good turn for him elsewhere.

In short, the advantages to be obtained by adopting Anythingarian sentiments are so many and so great, and at the same time so obvious to persons of any acquaintance with the world, that there cannot remain a doubt, I should think, but that this denomination must increase, and be the prevailing denomination. And young

men who wish to rise in the world must make up their minds to join it, or give up their hopes of distinction, and be content to live and die in obscurity. D. D.

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ANECDOTE,

*Extracted from a scarce and valuable publication.*

There was an Italian Bishop who had struggled through great difficulties without repining, and who met with much opposition in the discharge of his Episcopal functions without betraying the least impatience. An intimate friend of his, who highly admired those virtues which he thought it impossible to imitate, one day asked the prelate if he could communicate the secret of being always easy? 'Yes,' replied the old man, 'I can teach you my secret, and with great facility—it consists in nothing more than making a right use of my eyes.' His friend begged him to explain himself. 'Most willingly,' returned the Bishop. 'In whatsoever state I am, I first of all look up to heaven, and I remember my principal business here is to get there; I then look down upon the earth, and call to mind how small a space I shall occupy in it, when I come to be interred; I then look abroad into the world, and observe what multitudes there are, who are in all respects more unhappy than myself. Thus I learn where true happiness is placed, where all our cares must end, and how very little reason I have to repine or complain.'

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ORDINATIONS.

January 6, Rev. Charles White was ordained in Thetford, Vt. as colleague with Rev. Dr. Burton. Sermon by Rev. Dr. Tyler, President of Dartmouth College.

January 9, Rev. Alexander Young was ordained over the the New South Church and Society, Boston. Sermon by Rev. John G. Palfrey.

January 20, Rev. John D. Peirce, a graduate of Brown University, was ordained over the Congregational Church and Society, in Sangerfield, N. Y.—Sermon by Rev. William R. Weeks, of Paris.

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\* \* \* *Nomos* is just received.

*Chas. Henry*

THE  
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2. Those who become responsible for five copies shall receive the sixth gratis.

3. No subscriptions can be taken for less than a year; and if notice of discontinuance is not given before the issuing of the last number, subscribers will be considered as desiring it the succeeding year.

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